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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Verlag Barbara Budrich

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Tobio, C. (2001). Marriage, cohabitation and youth residential independence in Spain. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 13(2), 104-123. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-323040>

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Constanza Tobío

# Marriage, cohabitation and youth residential independence in Spain

Einstellungen zur Ehe, zum unverheirateten Zusammenleben und zum Beziehen einer eigenen Wohnung bei jungen Erwachsenen in Spanien

## Zusammenfassung

Verglichen mit anderen europäischen Ländern leben in Spanien weniger junge Erwachsene unverheiratet zusammen. Dies hängt jedoch nicht damit zusammen, dass sie sich häufiger für die Ehe entscheiden. Junge Erwachsene in Spanien schieben den Auszug aus dem Elternhaus vergleichsweise lange hinaus; die Mehrheit von ihnen wohnt auch noch mit über 30 Jahren bei den Eltern. Jüngere Untersuchungen belegen, dass unverheiratetes Zusammenleben allgemein akzeptiert und positiv wahrgenommen wird. Nur eine Minderheit der Bevölkerung verurteilt die Kohabitation als nicht akzeptabel. Die gesetzlichen Rahmenbedingungen verändern sich ebenfalls sehr schnell, was vor allem als Ergebnis des von homosexuellen Organisationen ausgehenden Drucks interpretiert werden kann. Bezogen auf die zukünftige Entwicklung stellt sich die Frage, ob ein Trend zum unverheirateten Zusammenleben sich für ganz Europa dokumentieren lässt. Im Falle Spaniens ändern sich einige der Hauptfaktoren, die das relativ späte Ausziehen aus dem Elternhaus verständlich machen (z.B. Arbeitslosigkeit, niedrige Berufstätigkeitsquote bei Frauen) relativ schnell, während andere Faktoren sich nur sehr langsam verändern (z.B. trägt das nach wie vor niedrige Angebot von angemessenen Wohnungen auf dem Immobilienmarkt dazu bei, dass Paare erst spät – sei es verheiratet oder unverheiratet – zusammenziehen und einen eigenen Hausstand gründen.

*Schlagworte:* Unverheiratetes Zusammenleben, Ehe, Familiengründung, Spanien.

## Abstract

Cohabitation in Spain is low, compared to most other European countries. However, this cannot be explained by marriage as an alternative choice. The younger generations of Spaniards are increasingly delaying residential independence, a majority of them staying with their families of origin until they are well in their thirties. Recent empirical evidence shows that social perceptions towards cohabitation are quite positive. Only a minority of the population considers it as an unacceptable practice. The legal context is also rapidly changing, specially as a result of the pressure of homosexual organisations. Looking towards the future the question that arises is if there is a common trend towards increasing cohabitation all over Europe. In the Spanish case some of main factors that explain late residential autonomy (unemployment, low level of female economic activity) seem to be changing quickly, while others (access to housing) continue being an obstacle to the formation of new families, either through cohabitation or marriage.

*Keywords:* Cohabitation, marriage, family formation, Spain.

## Introduction

In 1991 Salustiano del Campo, a well-known sociologist in Spain, published a book with the following title: *The „new“ Spanish family*. More recently another sociologist, Inés Alberdi, wrote another book called *The new Spanish family* (1999). The extent to which the family has changed or remained as it has always been in its basic elements has probably been the main issue of debate in the last years among researchers working on family matters in this country. Three main types of changes are generally accepted as relevant. In the first place the legal reforms undertaken in 1981 to adapt the Civil Code to the Constitution of 1978 based on the principle of equal rights between women and men, as well as between all children, regardless of the marital status of their parents. In the second place, tolerant attitudes towards different family forms and practices such as divorce, lone motherhood, cohabitation, abortion, etc. In the third place, the impact of the rapid involvement of women in paid work. But, on the other hand, it is argued that the nuclear family composed of a couple with children continues to be as dominant as ever, cohabitation is extremely low and the family as an institution is highly valued.

Spain, together with Portugal, Greece and Italy as well as Ireland, which in many aspects behaves like a Southern country, has a very low proportion of cohabitants, less than 3% for all age groups between 20-34, both for men and women (Kiernan, 1999). This could be interpreted as a delay in the second demographic transition (Van de Kaa, 1987), one of whose characteristics is the increase in the number of cohabitants, either as a transitional phase before marriage or as an alternative to it. From this point of view several authors discuss to what extent still dominant traditional patterns of behaviour in the South of Europe will progressively change and converge with other European countries or, on the contrary, a different model where the family plays a central role will continue to exist (Reher, 1997; Todd, 1990; Paugam, 1996).

When data on marital status distribution are looked at (Kiernan, op. cit.) two different patterns seem to emerge in the Southern countries. Portugal and Greece behave, as it would be expected. Cohabitation is low because marriage is high: Around two thirds of women in their late twenties are married. But that is not the case in Spain and Italy as women aged 25-29 are not cohabiting but they are not marrying either. More than 50% of them are single in Spain (60% in Italy), the highest proportions among all European countries. Additional data from the European Fertility and Family Surveys show that almost one in two women in this same age group had never had a partner (in marriage or cohabitation) in Italy, and one in three in Spain and West Germany. So in the Spanish-Italian case old family patterns (marriage) are not being substituted by cohabitation, but seem to be in difficulties to reproduce themselves. Childbearing outside marriage is also low in these two countries, which explains why they have the lowest fertility in Europe and in

the world. According to Eurostat data for 1997 the European Union as a whole has a fertility index of 1,44 births per woman, the figure is 1,15<sup>1</sup> for Spain and 1,22 for Italy.

I will try to explain in this paper why the process of family formation is being delayed in Spain. Low levels of cohabitation are not necessarily linked to a reject of this type of partnership, but seem to be related to the difficulties the younger generations are finding to achieve the process of family formation, thus remaining until their thirties with their families of origin. Family structures are only apparently traditional and might indicate that old models are not viable any more, even if new models have not yet been established.

In the first part of the paper recent demographic trends on marriage, divorce and cohabitation are presented and discussed, as well as social perceptions and legal aspects. The second part of the paper focuses in the two reasons that are usually considered to explain the delay in the residential independence of the younger generations: Access to housing and unemployment. The often-neglected dimension of care will then be introduced as a relevant variable to understand current family support for the younger generations.

## Social and demographic trends

The middle seventies are a crucial period to understand current trends in family formation in Spain. Marriage rates increase slowly until 1975, then drop quickly in the next decade. Fertility rates follow a similar evolution. Women's average age at marriage decreased between 1950 and 1975 from 26 to 23. During the eighties it increased rapidly reaching 27 years of age in 1995 (Delgado & Castro, 1998, p. 25-32). The third phase of the demographic transition does not really start in Spain until the late seventies, when mortality has already stabilized at a low level and the birth rate rapidly decreases. After 1997 natural growth becomes negative (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1999, 2000). There is probably a coherence between modernization in demographic trends and the political transition from dictatorship to democracy that takes place during these same years (Maravall, 1985; Cotarelo, 1992).

Divorce was introduced in Spain in 1981 (with the exception of the II. Republic between 1932-1939 when it was allowed) (Alberdi, 1979). Since then the increase in the number of divorces has been slow but steady, specially during the nineties. A recent study on marriage and divorce in Spain (Solsona et al., 1998) shows that divorce affects specially the generation of those born between 1945-1955 (those that were young during the years of the political and demographic transition), those who marry very young, couples with more than three years of age difference between its members, with higher educational skills and living in dual earner couples. According to data from the 1995 Family and Fertility Survey (FFS) the

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1 The last provisional data for 1999 in Spain show that there has been a very slight increase in the fertility index (1,2) that cannot yet be considered a change in the trend (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2000).

younger generations seem to show a higher propensity towards divorce, but data cannot yet be considered as conclusive as the period of observation is still too short (Delgado & Castro, op. cit., p. 59-61). The relationship between divorce (and separation) and women's involvement in paid work in Spain has been pointed out in several studies (Alberdi, 1999; Tobío & Fernández Cordon, 1999). Spanish lone mothers have a high activity rate compared to mothers living in couple, a trend that can also be seen in Italy or in France. This is partly explained by the fact that women who can afford to divorce are those who are employed and partly by the logic of necessity. Lone mothers do not receive any specific social benefits and often they can only rely on their own income.

Compared to other European countries Spain ranks low both in marriage and divorce. The number of marriages was in 1995 five per thousand inhabitants. Only Italy, Finland, France, Ireland, and Sweden have a lower rate. The Spanish divorce rate is eight per ten thousand inhabitants, compared to twenty-nine in the UK, twenty-seven in Finland or twenty six in Sweden. Italy is the only case that falls below with a rate of six divorces per thousand inhabitants (Eurostat, 1997).

Cohabitation, as mentioned before, is also low in Spain, as well as in other Southern and Eastern European countries. Only 5% of Spanish women aged 25-29 were cohabiting in 1995 when the FFS was done. If data are looked at from a longitudinal perspective the percentage goes up to 11%, still far away from countries like Sweden or Finland where approximately 75% of women in the same age group have cohabited. Among the younger generations cohabitation is increasing, but it is not compensating the reduction in the number of marriages (Castro Martín, 1999).

There is very little information on the characteristics of cohabitants. A qualitative study done in 1987 in Madrid and Barcelona (Alabart et al., 1988) portrays a very specific group of people ideologically positioned and engaged in the left, with a medium-high professional level, non religious and half of them actively against marriage. The „drift“ into cohabitation that has been observed in England and Wales (Lewis, 1999), as well as in France (Kaufmann, 1992), does not appear in this case. Cohabitation is the result of a conscious decision, the reject of marriage playing an important role.

Surprisingly rapid demographic changes in Spain have not produced a rich public debate among researchers or politicians, probably because the state intervention in family matters, specially those concerning family formation or fertility, brings back remembrances of authoritarian policies during the dictatorship (Valiente, 1995). Low but increasing levels of divorce and cohabitation have been interpreted in different ways. Some authors (Del Campo, 1991; Iglesias de Ussel, 1998) stress the strength of the family in Spain in spite of relevant changes that are recognized. Kluzing (1995) has pointed the influence of the Catholic Church in many of the countries where cohabitation is a limited social practice. For other authors (Flaquer & Serratos, 1990; Alberdi, 1997, 1999) family changes have only begun and will develop in the years to come in the direction pointed out by the Northern and Central European countries. The Spanish family culture is said to be in a process of post-modernization, whose main characteristics would be the privatization of sex-

ual behaviour and the tolerance towards ways of life different to the normative family model established by Parsons (Meil, 1999).

Change and permanence seem in fact to be linked in a peculiar way in the Spanish family. Family structures show a very traditional picture, compared to most other European countries. More than half of private households (55,8%) is composed of a couple with children, the highest proportion among EU countries (European Commission, 1995, p. 48). But a different pattern emerges when low fertility is considered, as well as the peculiar age structure with few children and many young adults whose economic and residential independence from their families of origin is being delayed. There seems to be a blockage in the reproduction of generations, whose different aspects will be explored in this article.

## Social perceptions

One of the main characteristics that appears repeatedly in all attitudes surveys in Spain is the mind openness and the tolerance towards all sorts of different ways of life and behaviour, even if only a minority of the population puts them in practice. Tolerant and moderate attitudes and values have been pointed out as a characteristic of the Spanish transition towards democracy (Morán et al., 1995), as opposed to the tragic and passionate remembrance of the civil war 1936-39. According to Maravall (1985) the rapid adaptation to a new political culture in the seventies has to do with the historical memory of the democratic period of the II. Republic that was transmitted from the older to the younger generations in informal ways, especially through the family.

The family is a highly valued institution, even more in Spain than in most European countries, but less than in Greece, Portugal, Italy or Denmark (Commission des Communautés Européennes, 1993, p. 82). Positive attitudes towards marriage have increased during the last decade. In 1987 21% of the Spanish population agreed to the following proposition: „Marriage is an old fashioned institution“. In 1994 the percentage went down to 12% and those who did not agree increased to 85% (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1995, p. 18). Marriage for Spaniards is conceived as support in case of difficulties, more than in any other European country (53%). But at the same time the higher percentage of respondents compared to other countries say that marriage means accepting social pressures (14%) (Commission des Communautés Européennes, op cit., p. 54).

Religious marriage is a preferred option for half of the population. One third chooses cohabiting, more than half of which as an experience previous to marriage (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1997). The main reasons to prefer marriage as a personal option rather than cohabitation are the children (55%), religion (33%) and family pressure (29%) (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, op. cit., p. 20).

Social perceptions of cohabitation show differences according to the way the question is asked. Negative attitudes towards cohabitation are fairly consistent in different surveys done in the last years: Approximately one in five respondents clearly oppose to it. In some surveys a neutral position towards cohabitation is pre-

sented to the interviewed as a possible answer (not against nor in favour). In these cases a majority chooses this option, but when this is not possible, around two thirds of the population answer that cohabitation is an acceptable practice. (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1995, 1997; Commission des Communautés Européennes, 1993).

There is some information on attitudes towards rights for non-married couples. A clear majority (76%) considers that cohabitants should have the same rights in terms of survival pensions, social security, etc. than couples who are married, increasing to more than 80% among respondents below 44 years of age, as well as among those who define themselves as ideologically on the left. The same question regarding homosexual couples obtained 57% of positive answers. Among the latter 85% said that homosexual couples should be allowed to marry and 59% that they should be allowed to adopt children. (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1997).

Compared attitudes towards homosexual couples show that in all aspects studied (right to marry, rights for cohabitants compared to married couples, adoption of children and right to inherit) Spain ranks very high in social acceptance. Probably the most surprising answer has to do with adoption by homosexual couples, which is accepted by more than a third of the interviewed. Only the Dutch with almost 50% of positive answers express a higher support for this practice (Commission des Communautés Européennes, 1993, p. 93-97).

Perceptions on different kinds of sexual practices are generally positive, except in the case of extramarital relationships. A majority of the Spanish population accepts premarital relationships, except among teenagers below sixteen years old. One third of respondents accepts sexual intercourse between adults of the same sex, even though another third clearly rejects it. But what still is to a considerable degree taboo is sex outside marriage (for those who are married): 85% does not accept it (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1994). This supports the idea of the family as an institution that gives security and thus has to be protected. Sexual relationships are considered acceptable, except if they can be dangerous for the family.

The overall pattern these data seem to draw is a general attitude of acceptance towards very different ways of life, often not matched by what is personally chosen. There is a contrast between openness regarding how others live and much more traditional practices, which are still dominant. The perception of the family as an institution that gives support might be one of the clues to explain differences between attitudes and personal practices.

## Marriage, divorce and cohabitation in the law

The current legal framework for the family has been established by the Constitution of 1978. It must be mentioned that until then the Civil Code defined the family as based on masculine authority and women's dependence. Marriage was conceived as a sacrament with civil and administrative effects, which justified differences between children born in and out of marriage. The new Constitution, dis-

cussed and passed during the first years of the political transition, clearly states that women and men have equal rights in marriage, even though a more advanced proposal to assimilate marriage to „stable family relationships“ was not accepted (Estrada Alonso, 1986). The second aspect explicitly stated by the Constitution of 1978 is that all children are equal in the law, regardless of their parents' marital status (article 39). Married and unmarried parents have the same obligations towards their children. All other aspects regarding family relationships are established in general terms and were developed by further laws (Alberdi, 1993). In 1981 the Civil Code was reformed and all forms of legal discrimination between women and men abolished. A new article (1328) was introduced to forbid economic arrangements between spouses that go against equality between them.

Divorce was introduced in 1981 through a law that modifies the Civil Code (Ley 30/1981 de 7 de julio). Before this reform, separations and marriage annulments were the jurisdiction of ecclesiastic courts of justice. The pressure of the Catholic Church imposed a slow divorce with a compulsory phase of separation previous to the divorce. But on the other hand, mutual consent was introduced as one of the different possible types of divorce. Mutual consent has many advantages because it is cheaper, quicker and less conflictive as no guilt is required, which explains why it is increasingly chosen (Alberdi, 1999). The Law on Divorce includes implicitly a legal recognition of cohabitation, though limited to a very specific case: Those who could not marry because divorce did not exist until 1981. In this case it establishes the right of the surviving member of the cohabitant couple to Social Security benefits and survival pensions in analogy to marriage.

There are very few mentions of cohabitation in the Spanish law at the national level. One refers to the extinction of the right to a pension derived of the family situation, which can be caused by a new marriage or by cohabitation with another person (Civil Code, art. 101). What is surprising is that cohabitation is recognized to limit a right, but it is not to acknowledge it. Other mentions are more positive. Cohabitants who live in analogy to marriage (meaning heterosexual couples) have been recognized the right to adopt children, through changes in the Civil Code (Ley 21/1987, de 11 de noviembre). There is another mention regarding the rights of those who have been cohabiting for at least two years to remain in the house or apartment rented by the cohabiting partner in case of separation or death, in the same terms as married couples. It was introduced in the new law on house rentals passed in 1994 (Ventoso Escribano et al., 1996).

The increasing strength of gays' organisations and the effects of AIDS put on the political agenda, as in France (Théry, 1997) and other countries, the need to regulate cohabitation. A proposal of law was presented in the Spanish Parliament in 1997 (Ley de Contratos de Unión Civil) based on a contract between two cohabitants not compatible with marriage but open to a wide variety of relationships beyond sexual partners of the same or different sex (relatives, friends, colleagues, etc.). The project did not assimilate the civil unions to the family, thus leaving them out of the protection established by the Constitution. The civil union was just a private contract, presented in a public register, with the content the cohabiting partners would decide it to have. In the lack of definition it resembled very much the French PACS (Théry, 2000; Martin, 2000). This proposal did not find enough



consensus. For gays' organizations it did not meet their demands in terms of assimilation of rights between married and cohabiting couples (Coordinadora Gai-Lesbiana, 1998). For the conservatives in power (Partido Popular), who had presented the proposal, it went beyond what they were prepared to accept in spite of its multiple ambiguities. The proposal was finally withdrawn.

Since then several regions (comunidades autónomas) have legislated different aspects regarding cohabitation. The most important initiative has been the law on stable couple unions passed in 1998 by the Parliament of Catalonia (Ley 10/1998, de 15 de julio, de uniones estables de pareja). The law regulates both heterosexual and homosexual cohabiting couples, but in different terms. It is argued in the preface that the former do not marry because they do not want, the latter because they cannot. It is also said that heterosexual couples can reproduce biologically, whereas homosexual couples cannot. Thus the law is divided in two separate parts: Stable heterosexual unions and stable homosexual unions. In both cases cohabitants are included in a public register. A period of two years of cohabitation is required only for heterosexual couples, except if they have common children when this is not necessary. A minimum number of rights and obligations are established in the text of the law. In addition, cohabitants can agree on other rights, obligations and economic compensations between the members of the couple. The law makes two relevant differences between heterosexual and homosexual couples. The first one regards to the right to adopt, which is not permitted to the latter. The second one has to do with the regulation of inheritance rights, which are considerably extended to homosexual cohabitants in case of death of one of the partners with no will.

The regional parliament of Aragón passed in 1999 a similar law that does not permit cohabitant homosexual couples to adopt children. But in other regions (Comunidad Valenciana, Castilla-La Mancha and Baleares) a temporary adoption (acogimiento) has been introduced as a right for homosexual couples through changes in the laws that regulates the situation of children (Ley del Menor). Very recently (June 2000) a law was passed in the Parliament of Navarra on cohabiting couples both heterosexual and homosexual, that includes for the first time in Spain the right of the latter to adopt children. The proposal was passed in spite of the opposition of the conservative political party in power in this region (Unión del Pueblo Navarro). The main argument of members of parliament which supported the proposal was that adoptions by homosexual couples are already a established practice as single persons do have the right to adopt. The main argument against had to do with „psycho-social damage“ for the children (EL PAÍS, 2000a).

Many of the laws passed at the regional level related to cohabitation find a barrier in aspects that have to do with the national law on aspects like social security or state taxes. Three different proposals of law have recently been presented in the Spanish Parliament and will be discussed during the 2000-2001 sessions. The first one was presented by the Socialist Party<sup>2</sup>. The proposal is based on the idea that

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2 Proposición de Ley 122/000023 por la que se reconocen determinados efectos jurídicos a las parejas de hecho. Presentado por el grupo Parlamentario Socialista, Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, 25 de abril de 2000.

cohabitation has become an accepted social practice requiring regulation. It applies to cohabitants linked by a relationship of affection, regardless of their sex. Married persons are excluded, as well as relatives (up to a second degree of consanguinity). Actual cohabitation during a period of six months is required, except if the couple has common children when no minimum period is required. The main changes proposed refer to assimilation of cohabitants to married couples regarding inheritance in cases of death with no will, social security survival pensions and the taxing system. The two other proposals were presented by the former Communist Party (Izquierda Unida)<sup>3</sup> and by a group of small green and nationalist parties of the left (Grupo Mixto)<sup>4</sup>. The main difference with the socialist proposal is that it includes the right of adoption for homosexual cohabitants. The party in government, the conservative Partido Popular, has not presented any proposal, nor have their former supporters, the Basque and Catalan nationalists. A national law on cohabitation does not seem to be in the agenda of the conservatives, which are now governing with absolute majority since the last elections in March 2000. However, pressure from homosexual organisations has increased, as well as public debate on the subject.

There are other initiatives regarding the formal recognition of cohabitation to be mentioned. Several cities and regions have opened in the last years public registers for cohabitant couples<sup>5</sup>. The inclusion does not have any direct effects in the law but can be used as a proof that a couple is living together in administrative procedures or in courts of justice. There is not much information about the number and characteristics of registered couples. In the Region of Madrid e.g. 2278 couples have been registered since 1995, but nothing more is known about them, not even their sex (EL PAÍS, 2000b).

The main differences between married couples and cohabitants have to do with joint property, especially in case of separation or death of one of the partners, and with pensions and maintenance. Access to the National Health Service is not an is-

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3 Proposición de Ley 122/000028 de Medidas para la igualdad jurídica de las parejas de hecho. Presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario Federal de Izquierda Unida, Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, 8 de mayo 2000.

4 Proposición de Ley 122/000048 de Igualdad jurídica para las parejas de hecho. Presentada por el grupo Parlamentario Mixto, Boletín Oficial de las cortes Generales, 29 de mayo de 2000.

5 For example, the City of Vitoria (in the Basque Country) opened in 1994 (Decreto de creación del Registro Municipal de Uniones Civiles del Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz) a public register of cohabiting couples to encourage equality between this kind of families and those based on marriage, as a provisional measure until legal initiatives at the regional or national level are taken. The fact of cohabitation is registered, as well as the contracts agreed among the partners regarding property and personal relationships. Cohabiting couples of the same or different sex are admitted, but consanguine relatives are not. The Region of Madrid passed a law in 1995 (Decreto 36/1995, de 20 de abril por el que se crea el Registro de Uniones de Hecho de la Comunidad de Madrid) to establish a public register of cohabiting couples of the same or different sex. Relatives and those linked by adoption cannot constitute a „unión de hecho“.

sue as entitlements are universal since 1986 (Ley 14/86 General de Sanidad). There are some differences in the tax system but only for those with lower levels of rent. Married individuals can choose if they want to pay their taxes jointly or separately, this last option being normally better.

There is one last element to be considered on heterosexual cohabitation in Spain. This social practice is less conspicuous here than in most other European countries as women never change their name when they marry. There is no way to tell by external signs if two persons living together are married or not.

In short, the social context for heterosexual cohabitation is quite positive and probably not so different to other countries in Europe. There is not a reject of cohabitation *per se*, except for a minority of the population, approximately one fifth. But there seems to be a previous problem that might explain why young women and men are increasingly delaying departure from their homes of origin and the formation of their own families.

## Residential autonomy, employment and housing

Historically the process of family formation has been different in Spain compared to many other European countries where significant proportions of very young men and women left their homes to work as servants for quite a long period of time before they married (Laslett, 1983, p. 526-527). In Spain seldom young people left their homes before marrying as residential autonomy, marriage and family formation were closely linked, as they still are (Reher, 1996, p. 376-377).

Passage rites and clear borderlines between youth and adult life are disappearing in developed countries. Being a teenager and being a young adult are increasingly becoming two different situations along the life of a person (Galland, 1998; De Singly, 1998). The transition between dependency of the family of origin and autonomous life is longer and more complex than ever. The synchronization between employment, marriage and residential autonomy is disappearing and all sorts of different combinations between these three aspects of independent adult life are now possible. For example in France 28% of young people living with their parents have a job and 36% live on their own without having a job (De Singly, op. cit.). In the Southern European countries, and particularly in Spain, the phase of transition to adult independent life is specially long as depart from the family of origin is not taking place for a majority of young people before they are thirty (Ruiz de Olabuénaga, 1998).

A study based on European Labour Force Surveys (Fernández Cordón, 1997a, 1997b) shows that differences in residential independence trends between Central and Southern European countries are very important and have considerably increased between 1986-1994. At the beginning of the period more than two thirds of young men aged 20-29 were still living with their family of origin in Greece, Italy and Spain (72% in this last country). These figures compare to only 46% in Germany, 41% in the UK and 36% in France. Eight years after in 1994 the gap had widened: 79% in Spain, 78,5% in Italy and 71% in Greece, compared to 44% in Germany, 36% in the UK and 41% in France. Labour market occupation provides

only a partial explanation. Germany and the UK have the highest employment rates for those age groups (around 75%) but in Greece the rate is higher than in France. Spain represents an extreme case with a very low employment rate (54%) and a very high proportion of young men living with their parents. Trends for women are similar but with lower levels of those that still live with their parents, as they leave their families of origin earlier.

A majority of Spanish young people are entering their thirties without having yet achieved residential autonomy. Most authors (Martín Serrano & Velarde Hermida, 1996; Garrido & Requena, 1996) give two main reasons to explain this: Employment and housing. Unemployment in Spain is high, higher than any other country in Europe (European Commission, 1999). It affects mainly women and young people, young women being thus especially affected. But since 1994 youth unemployment has fallen dramatically and is now lower than in Italy and Greece. In addition, Spain has the highest proportion of temporary jobs in Europe, most of them occupied by the younger workers. Almost two thirds of young people's jobs in 1995 according to Labour Force Surveys were temporary, the proportion drops to 23% for ages 32-47 and only 15% for ages 48-64 (Garrido & Requena, *op. cit.*, p. 57). This is an effect of labour market restructuring from a fordist model to a flexible model that has been introduced through new norms applied to new contracts, creating a cleavage between middle aged workers for whom stable jobs is still the normal situation and young workers whose jobs are very often temporary as well as less protected and worse paid.

The result is that the economic autonomy of the young is being increasingly delayed (Martín Serrano & Velarde Hermida, *op. cit.*, p. 79-95). At age 29 only seven in ten people have acquired economic independence. In 1984 two thirds of those aged 25 were economically independent; the percentage has dropped to one third in ten years. Economic dependency of the young has increased in two different ways. On the one hand, those who are totally dependant have increased from 13% to 24%; on the other hand those, whose main source of income is their work but require complementary economic help from their families, have increased from 12% to 26%.

Lack of housing at affordable prices for the young is the second aspect that is more often mentioned to explain the delay in residential independence (Cortés Alcalá, 1995; Leal Maldonado, 1997). There is a considerable shortage of housing linked to speculative control over land markets. The interrelation between changes in the economic cycle, employment and housing demand has often had perverse effects on housing supply. For example, during the last eighties unemployment rates were considerably reduced and housing demand increased, thus provoking increases in housing prices that eliminated the positive effects of economic recovery in terms of access to housing (Leal Maldonado, *op. cit.*, p. 120-123). A similar process seems to be taking place now. Public housing policies are almost non-existent and state support has been mainly oriented towards private home ownership thus making it even more difficult for young people to obtain a dwelling.

The negative part of the story is that the younger generations are having great difficulties to acquire the two main preconditions of adult life: An independent income and a place to live in. But there is a more positive part of the story: Young

people are increasing their educational levels, which are now higher than the European average (Eurostat, 2000). During the last twenty years education, especially at university level, has been a priority in public policies, partly due to an almost federal (Moreno, 1997) reorganisation of the state based in autonomous communities (regions). Now each of the seventeen communities, as well as most of the fifty provinces, has at least a public university campus, most of them in the cities or near. The model is a based on quite affordable fees (students pay around 20% of the real cost) but very few grants for subsistence or facilities for accommodation, which means that staying with their parents is necessary for most students.

The result is that a combination of different factors is making it very difficult for young people to begin to live on their own, at least before they are thirty. On the other hand homes of origin have become quite tolerant and cosy for young people. The old authoritarian family whose *leitmotiv* was intergenerational conflict was still dominant only twenty years ago, now it belongs to the past. The child centred family (Roussel, 1992, p. 183-220) seems to be the dominant model, this meaning concern and control regarding their studies but considerable flexibility in the use of time, relationships, privacy and intimacy. For example two thirds of young people over eighteen living with their parents say that they can stay alone in their room with their boyfriend/girlfriend with the door locked, half of them that they can bring them to stay a few days with them and one third of women respondents that they can have sexual relations with their boyfriends in the home (half of them in the case of male respondents). Interestingly enough parents' control over studies is more intense for girls than for boys (Martin Serrano & Velarde Hermida, op. cit., p. 206-210). According to another national survey (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1999) representative of the population aged 15-29 living with their parents a majority (90%) says that decisions regarding them are always openly discussed with their parents and in more than half of the cases are commonly agreed. The Spanish young people (98%) consider family and friends as the two most important things in life (after having good health). Slightly below are rated employment and dwelling. Only one in three respondents think religion is important and even less, one in five that politics are.

Complementary to the increasing residential dependence of the young are the longer and longer nights during the weekends when „they can do as they wish“ in streets, bars or discos. Nights, after hours and even going out for a whole day or a couple of days represents transgression in a context of control and order dominating young Spaniards' lives. Almost half of the Spanish younger population normally goes out on weekends and almost all of them do it sometimes. Nights are clearly associated to sex, alcohol, and drugs (Ruiz Olabuénaga, op.cit., p. 111-119; Comas, 1994). According to a recent comparative survey the use of drugs (including alcohol) among Spanish young people aged 15-29 is above the European average (83% compared to 74%) (Plan Nacional sobre Drogas, 2000).

On the whole young people in Spain seem to be quite happy. A clear majority (88%) says they are happy (Elzo, 1992, p. 46) and two thirds say that the main feeling during the last week was being happy or satisfied (Díez Nicolás, 1995, p. 73). Only a minority (less than 10%) consider their parents too strict (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1999). There is not much information about parents'

feelings towards the delayed presence of their adult children at home. In France 15% of young people living on their own said that when they left their homes of origin their parents thought it was about time for them to settle by themselves (Bozon et al., 1994). According to the Spanish Constitution parents have to provide for their children until they can support themselves. There is some evidence of problems when support becomes abuse. Now and then cases of conflicts between parents and children are appearing in the courts of justice regarding this obligation when the latter are well in their twenties or thirties<sup>6</sup>.

In short the Spanish younger generations are not being „pulled“ out of their families of origin by the labour market or encouraged to live on their own. They are not either being „pushed“ out of their homes by authoritarian ways of life or conflicts with their parents. This situation is quite the opposite to what was common twenty five years ago when jobs and housing were easy to find and intense generational conflict was a good reason to leave home as soon as possible, even if to do so the only way was to marry.

## The gender dimension

There is yet one more aspect affecting changes in the process of family formation that is often neglected: The gender dimension. In most families with young people aged 15-29 the male breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992) is dominant. In two thirds of the cases the mother does not have a job and is devoted to taking care of the home and its members (Martín Serrano & Velarde Hermida, op. cit., p. 46-47). Cosy homes are to a considerable extent explained by women's work. But today's mothers of grown up children represent the last generation of Spanish women in which a majority of its members are housewives.

Data from Eurostat Labour Force Surveys show that global female activity rates are low in Spain, 36,7% in 1997 compared to 45,6% in the EU. But distances are shortening: In 1986 there was a difference of 12,8 points, which has been reduced to 8,9 points. In fact women's activity is rapidly increasing in Spain, more rapidly than what can be thought from these figures because increases are not homogeneous for all age groups. The younger generations are massively entering the labour market and, what is more important, not leaving it when they have children. The older generations, women over forty and especially over fifty still have very low activity rates, thus explaining why the progression of the global rate is slow. The age group 30-34 is especially significant because most women are mothers with small children (though seldom now of more than one or two). In 1981 the activity

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6 For example a divorced mother was condemned by a court of justice to pay a pension to her 27 year old son for maintenance until he obtains enough income to support himself. The father was condemned to let the son live with him in his home. The woman, María Dolores R.B., has declared to the press that she will promote the creation of an association to defend parents that are being obliged to support their grown up children „beyond what is reasonable“ and to try to change the law (EL PAÍS, 2000c).

rate for this age group was only 30,9%, in 1999 it is 68,1% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1981, 1999).

Looking towards the near future, it seems that mothers will not be so available as homemakers as they have been in the past. It is not impossible to foresee that parents might become increasingly concerned about earlier residential autonomy of their youngsters, some symptoms of which are beginning to appear. Women's unpaid work is taken for granted; it only gains visibility when they enter the labour market and new solutions have to be found. Care becomes an issue (Finch & Groves, 1983; Ungerson, 1987, 1990).

Another aspect related to gender has to do with the ideas and values about family and marriage that mothers of today are transmitting to their daughters. In my own qualitative research on working mothers in big Spanish cities<sup>7</sup> daughters seem to represent for them the continuation of a process which they feel they have initiated (Tobío, 99). They think the next generation of women will go on along the same path. They see their daughters and the young girls in general like themselves but improved, more sure of themselves, stronger, more prepared. What they have not been able to achieve or what meant for them a big effort will be for the younger generation, they think, much easier.

The main idea working mothers of today want to transmit to their daughters is that the most important thing is their own individual autonomy concretized in their being able to make a living for themselves, to earn their own money. They will not need a man for that. Marriage and the family are not any more an alternative but a complement of their autonomy, not even a necessary complement. A man is not any more a 'destiny' for women, nor marriage a 'vocation', but just one more aspect of life more related to emotions than to survival. Paid work will increasingly be a fact for woman, this will not be any more a choice, and they will all work. Marriage and children will be a choice rather than employment.

„What they will choose will be if they marry or they do not marry; they will not be able to choose if they will or will not work.”

(Discussion group, Madrid, working mothers, married or living in partnership, upper class).

This kind of discourse is especially explicit among high skilled working mothers, but it also appears among low level working mothers. In this case what is stressed

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7 Two different studies were done using the same methodology. The first was based on six discussion groups and twenty-six in-depth interviews with working mothers living in partnership in the four main Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao). The main variables to select the interviewees were age (20-29, 30-39, 40-49) and social class (high, middle, low) defined according to the women's occupation (Tobío, Arteta & Fernández Córdón et al., 1996). The second one was based on six discussion groups in the same four cities and eighteen in-depth interviews among lone mothers, using the same main variables to select the interviewees, except in the case of inactive women for whom the occupational level of the former husband/partner was used (Fernández Córdón & Tobío, 1999). The fieldwork was done between 1996 and 1998.

is the fact that the reasons why women work nowadays are different than what they used to be when their mothers were their age. In past times women did work but in the context of the family (in agricultural family exploitations or family businesses). Even if they worked for a salary the money they got was not considered as their own individual money, but as part of the family income. Now, it is said, when women work they do it for themselves, they perceive what they earn as their own individual money. The family is becoming less important as economic support for women. The increasing possibility of a divorce is an important reason to work. Economic independence is necessary for women, even to be able to make the decision of divorcing.

„If they reach a point when they have to divorce and begin again, economic independence is everything. Because if not, they cannot even do it. Many women do not divorce because they cannot afford it.“

(In depth interview, Madrid, working mother, married, middle class).

The new situation clarifies the reasons why people continue living together in the terms of Giddens (1992) „pure relationships“.

„If you continue living with your husband it is because you want to, not because you depend on him.“

(In depth interview, Madrid, working mother, married, upper class).

Lone mothers elaborate the more radical discourse on marriage when asked about the future, when their own daughters will be the age they are now. The main idea is that men will not be necessary, women will be self-sufficient and will not need men. A family model based on a mother with her children is conceived as desirable, maybe in a gratifying projection of their own situation.

„Maybe tomorrow people will live like that, women with their children, if they can live by themselves, of course, I do not know, it is a far away future, I do not know. But, but, well, maybe like the lionesses in the jungle, yes, that's it. (...) Husbands are not necessary any more, that's what I say, like the lionesses with their cubs and when the cubs become independent the lioness goes on with her life hunting and the lion is just sitting under a tree and the lionesses hunting... (she laughs).“

(In depth interview, Madrid, working lone mother, middle class)

Even housewives with a traditional discourse on themselves often say that they want their daughters to be different:

„And in spite of that [traditional points of view regarding men and women previously expressed] I tell my daughter that she must work, that she must study and have a job, that she must not stay at home to be a housewife.

(Discussion group, rural area in the region of Madrid, housewives over forty) (Tobio et al., 2000, p. 160)



Lewis (forthcoming) suggests that the decline of the male breadwinner model has produced different expectations of marriage, expectations or „culture“ working as mediation between macro changes and individual behaviour. Qualitative research on Spanish working mothers shows clearly changes in expectations towards marriage and the family. Past times when the dominant women's attitudes were based on the notion of sacrifice as a typical feminine virtue seem to have definitely disappeared. Between discourse and behaviour there is often an important gap. When women speak about themselves and their actual everyday experience the principle of reality is clearly dominant, but when they project themselves in their daughters or in the future generations of women, new mentalities emerge as fantasies or desires pointing to social change. The meaning of marriage seems to be rapidly changing: It does not represent any more a secure institution for life. Security becomes an individual issue linked to employment and citizenship; marriage becomes a private issue linked to affinities and choice (Théry, 1993).

## Conclusion

Cohabitation in Spain is low, but this cannot be interpreted simply as an indicator of traditional behaviour. Family structures are only apparently traditional. A very high proportion of families are composed of a married couple with children, but often these are adults well in their twenties and even in their thirties that have not yet achieved residential independence. There seems to be a crisis in the process of family formation, as the low number of marriages and the extremely low fertility show. A majority of the members of the younger generations are not beginning to live in couple until they are more than thirty. The transition from dependence to full independence that is becoming longer and longer in many European countries does not include in the Spanish case residential autonomy.

Two different questions have to be asked. The first one is why young Spaniards begin their life in couple so late. The second one is why when they begin to live in partnership they normally marry. A combination of economic, sociological and demographic factors can explain the first question. High youth unemployment rates -partly due to the demographic pressure of large generations entering the labour market in a period of reduction of employment- have been delaying economic independence. The rapid increase in housing prices during the eighties and nineties is another related factor. In compensation, higher education rates have also increased and families have provided support for their adult children. This might change in the next years as the labour market situation is rapidly changing, new employment is being created and the new generations entering the labour market are much smaller. In addition, families might become less capable or willing to provide support for their adult children, as it can be foreseen that housewives will soon represent only a minority of mothers. Housing will probably continue to be an important problem, especially in the big cities. In short, there are different fac-

tors that might encourage young people to leave their families of origin and begin to live in partnership earlier.

The second question is if cohabitation will increase or marriage will continue to be by large the preferred option. Available data show that cohabitation has slowly increased in the last years. Social perceptions towards this practice are either neutral or favourable, even though a majority of the Spanish population stills prefers marriage as a personal option. Perceived social pressure is bigger than in other European countries, but only a minority says this is a reason to marry. There are clear symptoms of privatization of couple relationships and of a lack of interest in marriage as an institution that provides security to its members and assures survival. This is increasingly becoming an individual affair based on employment and state support. The legal framework is rapidly changing, mainly due to the pressure of homosexual organizations, and the recognition of the rights of cohabitants in comparison to married couples is becoming an issue of public debate.

Ideological factors are not the main reason to explain why cohabitation is low in Spain. It is much more related to structural elements like employment and housing, as well as to education policies and the role of the family. Mentalities might rather explain why young people begin to acquire residential independence earlier – cohabitation could become a more common practice.

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